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ABSTRACT

This bulletin outlines the major components of a crisis-preparedness and response plan for schools. It lists the critical components of a safe-school plan, such as community coordination, curriculum, proactive student discipline policies and procedures, safe physical environment, school security, staff and student training, evaluation and monitoring of school safety, and a crisis-response plan. It describes the goals of a crisis-response team, and examines what needs to be done before a crisis, including the formation of a crisis-response team within the school, the development of a written crisis or emergency response plan, the coordination of the plan with community emergency personnel, and the training of staff on elements of the plan. The document also details responses to crises on or away from the school grounds and discusses the major steps of a crisis-response procedure, such as how to deal with the media. Suggestions for helping students cope with loss, an overview of how to handle special situations, including returning to the scene, and some of the followup procedures for students, staff, and caregivers are provided. Listings of further resources, the manifestations of grief in youth, and other information appear at the end. (Contains 20 references.) (RJM)

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Crisis Prevention and Response

Is Your School Prepared?

Cathy Paine
Jeffrey Sprague

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Crisis Prevention and Response:

Is Your School Prepared?

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Jeffrey Sprague

INSTITUTE ON VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION · UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

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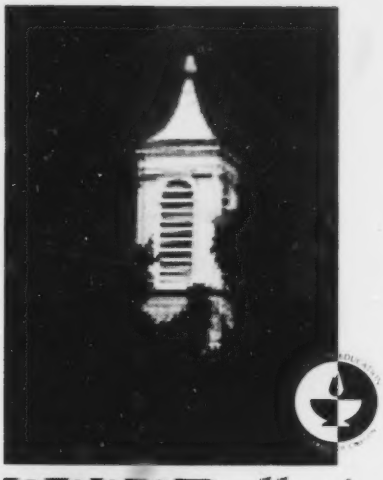

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Introduction

Perhaps no issue in recent years has galvanized public concern in the way that school violence has. The specter of violent and antisocial behavior in our schools breeds fear and hinders the life-style of nearly everyone. Constant media coverage of recent mass school shootings across the United States adds to the perception that schools are inherently unsafe and our communities and families are at risk.

Violence occurs in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities and is expressed through the activities of gangs, juvenile and adult criminals, and domestic abusers. Society no longer considers schools safe havens in which our children are free to learn and develop. On an increasing basis, school administrators and staff must deal with deadly violent incidents and threats of violence from students and others. Developing comprehensive school safety plans has become an integral part of school improvement planning.

Crisis Prevention and Response:
Is Your School Prepared?

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Critical Components of a Comprehensive Safe School Plan

Every school should develop and implement formal plans for school safety, discipline, and attendance (Stephens, 1995). Safety planning and application should be part of the ongoing school improvement process and should be based on valid and reliable data regarding risk and protective factors. Leadership and resources from school administration and the site-based management councils are critical to carry out a proactive and effective plan.

COMMUNITY COORDINATION

Many risk factors that affect school safety are found in the surrounding community. We may trace poverty, family distress, crime, drugs, and criminal activity to the homes of students and other community members and even the immediate neighborhood surrounding the school (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). Community agencies such as the police, church groups, social services, and the local media need to be involved in safe school planning. Increasingly, schools employ police personnel (school resource officers) to provide supervision within and around school campuses and to serve as instructors on drug abuse or violence prevention, for example. School resource officers can serve many valuable roles, the least of which may be to help children develop an understanding and trust of police personnel. Social service agencies, church groups, and concerned citizen volunteers can also help in planning and carrying out safe school plans.

CURRICULUM

Many children who attend school today have few skills in basic interpersonal interaction (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995), increasing the probability of negative peer and adult interactions. Systematic instruction in positive social behaviors is a critical component of a violence-prevention plan. Students may need instruction that focuses on skills such as peer mediation (Shepherd, 1994), appropriate classroom or recess behavior (Walker & Hops, 1993), empathy (Embry & Flannery, 1994), drug use prevention, law-related education, and good decision making. Developing plans for specific school needs (e.g., recess, assemblies, bus loading) also is necessary (Sugai & Horner, 1994).

PROACTIVE STUDENT DISCIPLINE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

An effective, proactive school discipline plan is an essential foundation of a safe school. Each school should have proactive plans addressing a) school-wide policies and procedures (Colvin, Kameenui, & Sugai, 1993; Sprick, Sprick, & Garrison, 1992), b) the unique concerns of specific settings such as assemblies or special events such as sports (Colvin et al.), d) classroom management, and e) individual student assessment and support (O'Neill et al., 1997). Effective use of each of these systems requires active supervision of students and systematic staff and student training.

SAFE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The nature of the school's physical plant and surroundings should also be considered when designing a safe school plan. This includes the location of the campus, the school grounds, and the buildings and classrooms (Stephens et al., 1995). The location of the school in its community or neighborhood may affect the likelihood of violence or crime as a result of proximity to certain businesses, traffic patterns, or neighborhood activities (e.g., drug dealing or vandalism). The school grounds should be assessed regarding ease of illegal trespassing or intrusion by dangerous individuals. School buildings themselves can either promote or deter certain types of unwanted behavior (Crowe, 1976; 1990). School personnel should assess the building for features such as ease of visual surveillance, number of open access doors, security systems, communication with the main office, and restrooms.

SCHOOL SECURITY

All students and teachers have a right to be protected against a) foreseeable criminal activity, b) student violence that adequate supervision can prevent, c) students whom authorities have identified as dangerous, d) dangerous individuals who are admitted to the school without proper clearance, and e) school administrators, teachers, and staff who have been negligently hired, retained or trained (Rapp, Carrington, & Nicholson, 1987). The best deterrent to most criminal activity is active supervision and visual monitoring of public areas in the school building (Crowe, 1976). A good way to detect gaps in school security is to work with local law enforcement personnel to review school policies and

procedures. Cooperative agreements between school and law enforcement personnel can help prevent many unfortunate incidents and reduce complications when they occur.

STAFF AND STUDENT TRAINING

As with any procedure, a comprehensive plan for training and informing staff and students is needed. Most of us practiced fire drills in school, and other emergency response behaviors are worthy of the same. For example, some schools practice an earthquake drill where students quickly move under their desks. This drill can also be used as a safety signal for teachers to get students to a safer place if a hostile intruder enters the classroom. Teachers need clear methods for communicating with the principal's office about dangerous events occurring in a particular part of the building. Without training and information, our experience has often been that each staff person responds differently to dangerous events. Many of these responses may not be in the best safety interest of children or adults and could make a situation worse.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF IMPACT ON SCHOOL SAFETY

Any effort worth doing well is worthy of regular evaluation and monitoring. Assuring a safe and orderly school is a major task for any school and community. As with any such undertaking, a thorough assessment of current risk and protective factors should guide development of safe school plans, staff training and support, and issues of daily operation.

CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN

No one believes that a crisis will happen to him or her. Low incidence crisis events such as a natural disaster, murder, or fire require proactive preparation to reduce negative impact during and after occurrence. An effective crisis response plan should assign clear roles for school staff, community service personnel such as police and fire, building and district administrative staff, and community members. The literature on school crisis is full of examples of how not to manage the event (Watson, Poda, Miller, Rice, & West, 1990).

An essential component of crisis response is effective communication. If a serious negative event occurs, notifying families in a way that will not promote panic is necessary. Administrative personnel need to effectively interact with media personnel and be able to give clear unambiguous responses to their questions. If temporarily closing the school is necessary, plans for safely transporting students to home or other safe locations must be in place. After the crisis, the school should reopen when possible. Schools that have experienced major crisis events all recommend that students be reintroduced to their school as soon as possible after the event. Children need to see that their school is still a safe place, and post-traumatic stress counseling, grief and loss counseling, and other services should be delivered at the school. Building staff will also need support and ongoing counseling to help with adjustment after the crisis.

Crisis Prevention and Response: Is Your School Prepared?

While the likelihood of a serious, violent incident in a school is extremely low (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 1999), schools must be prepared for a range of serious crisis events such as the death of a student or staff member, violent incidents, extreme weather, a comprehensive crisis response plan must be developed and disseminated. Staff, students and family members need to be informed and trained in implementing discreet crisis plans in response to a range of possible negative events.

This bulletin outlines the major components of a crisis preparedness and response plan with how-to descriptions for each component. We include checklists as appropriate and refer the reader to additional resources on this critical topic.

Goals of a Crisis Response Team

The primary goal of a crisis response team is to assist a school to function in the event of a crisis or tragedy that has an impact on members of the building. The crisis response team, which meets as soon as possible after the event, will determine the steps to be taken in response to a given incident. Trained staff may be called from other buildings to provide immediate support to the school staff. The trained crisis response team members are less personally affected by the event, and their special training enables them to give helpful assistance.

An additional function of crisis response is to provide support to students, staff, and parents by responding to the event in a calm, compassionate, and timely manner. This type of response results in a school climate where students and staff may express their feelings, ask questions, and obtain assistance in returning to "normal."

When a crisis occurs, a response will take place at one of three levels, depending on the extent of the crisis. The length and type of crisis response is different in each of the following.

- *Building-level*: Building team members are able to respond to the event themselves. The response is short in duration (1-2 days) and affects a relatively small number of people (e.g., a student accident, death, or chronic illness).

- *District-level:* The event is larger, and staff members need the assistance of team members from other buildings or districts. The response lasts several days to a week, and affects people across several settings in the district (e.g., a staff member death, the deaths of several students in one family).
- *Trauma response:* A portion or all of the students/staff are traumatized by an event, causing disruption of normal events in the school or district. Outside resources are needed, and the response often lasts a week or more. Grief is complicated by posttraumatic stress syndrome, as when students witness a stabbing, a natural disaster occurs, or many students and staff members witness a school shooting.

Before a Crisis: Preparation

FORM A CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM WITHIN THE SCHOOL

The first step is to identify a group of individuals to serve on a crisis team. A team approach to crisis response will help students and staff members by:

- reducing the fear and anxiety that accompanies a crisis such as the death of a student or staff member;
- becoming educated in the dynamics of grief and prepared for what they might experience;
- having an opportunity to express their feelings in an accepting environment.

When forming a crisis response team, it is important to select people who think clearly, who are able to see alternative solutions to problems, who handle multiple tasks simultaneously, and who tend to react calmly under stress. The team composition is important, because team members need to model effective coping strategies during a crisis. Staff turnover may make it necessary to identify crisis response team members at the beginning of each school year.

DEVELOP A WRITTEN CRISIS OR EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

Each school district should develop a written crisis response plan that describes intervention procedures and the responsibilities of the team members. The plan should define roles and responsibilities of crisis team members, phone tree directions, activities to help students deal with loss, media and communications guidelines, memorials and healing events, and long term follow up. Information on these topics is contained in this article. Directions for responding to specific emergency events (not included here) should also be covered in a crisis response plan. A crisis response team checklist to outline major activities is provided below. Table 1 lists suggested staff responsibilities.

CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM CHECKLIST
(Use During Team Meeting.)

ACTIVITY *(Check box when activity is completed.)*	PERSON RESPONSIBLE *(Identify before a crisis.)*
❑ Verify facts.	_____
❑ Contact staff (phone tree).	_____
❑ Convene crisis team.	_____
❑ Identify family contact person.	_____
❑ Arrange for substitute teachers.	_____
❑ Write announcement to students.	_____
❑ Morning staff meeting.	_____
❑ Set up safe rooms.	_____
❑ Distribute suggestions for classroom discussion.	_____
❑ Notify students.	_____
❑ Provide list of readings and materials to teachers.	_____
❑ Write and send letter to parents.	_____
❑ After-school staff meeting.	_____
❑ Parent/community meeting.	_____
❑ Plan memorial/remembrance.	_____
❑ Post-intervention debriefing.	_____
❑ Follow-up with students.	_____
❑ Contact district media person.	_____

Source: Springfield Public Schools, ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE TO CRISIS RESPONSE, 1994

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Table I: Staff Responsibility Guide

Principal

- Receive notification of death
- Verify information
- Notify superintendent
- Notify crisis response team, call meeting
- Make announcement to school
- Write announcement to be read in classes
- Notify media liaison
- Schedule special staff meeting
- Hire substitute teachers
- Write phone inquiry statement
- Attend special staff meetings
- Notify other principals
- Write and send letter to parents
- Grant release time for funeral attendance
- Attend funeral if desired
- Write condolence note to family

Crisis Response Team

- Initiate phone tree
- Notify family liaison
- Call outside consultants
- Contact community resource people
- Contact student leaders
- Open crisis centers
- Distribute literature
- Notify librarian to put grief books on reserve
- Attend faculty meetings
- Plan community meeting

Teachers

- Read announcement
- Modify class, if needed
- Talk with students
- Clarify misinformation
- Activities to encourage expression of feelings
- Express own feelings
- Give grief information
- Make no judgment of grief
- Encourage remembering deceased
- Refer students as necessary
- Support students
- Use support services for self
- Write condolence note to family
- Have in-school and outside resources talk with classes
- Attend funeral if desired

Guidance Counselors

- Staff crisis centers
- Talk with students
- Clarify misinformation
- Encourage students to express feelings
- Express own feelings
- Give grief information
- Make no judgment of grief
- Give priority to referrals
- Support students
- Use support resources for self
- Attend funeral if desired

Physician

- See students
- Make assignments
- Make referrals
- Contact parents
- Attend funeral if desired

School Psychologist/ Social Worker

- Primary referral
- Primary referral
- In-school treatment of students
- Staff counseling and education
- Complete student assessments
- Make referrals to physician or community agency
- Contact parents
- Attend funeral if desired

School Nurse

- Care for physical needs
- Allow students to express emotions
- Provide comfortable location
- Make assessment of students
- Make referrals
- Attend funeral if desired

Family Liaison

- Contact family
- Offer help
- Obtain needed information
- Inform school of procedures
- Help gather personal items of deceased student/s
- Attend funeral
- Maintain contact with family after funeral

Source: Springfield Public Schools, Administrator's Guide to Crisis Response, 1994.

COORDINATE THE PLAN WITH COMMUNITY EMERGENCY PERSONNEL

Once a rough draft of the plan is developed, engage the police, fire, rescue, hospital, and mental health services personnel in the community in reviewing the plan. Develop strategies to coordinate the efforts of each of these agencies in the event of a large-scale crisis. Provide maps of all school buildings that include (location of important switches and valves) to law enforcement, fire department, and emergency responders. In addition, conduct "mock" emergency drills to test the plan, including both lock-down and evacuation procedures. For example, in 1994, the Springfield School District administrators and emergency officials collaborated in drafting the school district's emergency procedures. Coincidentally, a mock disaster drill, a drill in which the hospital emergency responders were called to the high school to treat a large number of "injured" students, was held at Thurston High School just a year before the tragic shooting occurred there.

CONDUCT TRAINING FOR STAFF, INCLUDING INFORMATION ON ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN

Preparation for handling crises at school, before a tragedy happens, is essential. This is the only way to assure rapid and sensitive handling of deaths and other crises that affect the school. In-service training for staff on grief and loss should be a necessity rather than a choice. Provide training for crisis personnel in the dynamics of grief and loss, critical incident debriefing, activities that help students deal with a loss, community resources, and trauma response.

During a Crisis: What are the Steps?

Box A Lists the major steps of a crisis response procedure (Dwyer, Osher & Warger, 1998; Paine, 1994). We describe each step in the process in the section below.

IF A CRISIS OCCURS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

- *Immediate response:* When an emergency occurs on a school campus, those immediately on the scene perform the seven basic steps of an emergency response.
- *Within the first hour:* The first hour or so of an on-campus crisis will be filled with confusion and chaos. The steps listed address appropriate responses by the crisis team in setting up communication systems, notifying parents, and coordinating with community agencies.

IF A CRISIS OCCURS AWAY FROM SCHOOL:

- *Immediate response:* In the event of a tragedy that occurs off campus, the principal is generally the person who receives notification. The principal immediately verifies accuracy of the information and determines how to share it with staff and students. If possible, the principal shares information with staff before they share it with students.
- *Within the first hour:* The principal (or designee) contacts the superintendent, school staff (via phone tree if school is not in session), and staff of other schools as appropriate. The principal should contact the district media spokesperson if it is anticipated the event will draw media attention.

FOR ALL CRISES

Continue with the following steps:

- *Preparation for the school day:* The crisis team should meet as soon as possible after notification of a tragedy. In the meeting, the team reviews the roles and responsibilities of the team members and prepares materials for staff and students.

INFORMING STUDENTS OF A TRAGEDY

Sample Announcement

Today we received tragic news. We were informed that one of our students, _____, died from _____. [*Give any details that are known and relevant here.*]

When events like this happen, people react in many ways. You may see people acting sad, upset, angry, or shocked. We all need to practice patience and respect for each other. Some of us will want quiet time or time to talk with an adult. Some of us will be ready to return to academics sooner than others.

We can take some time to talk about this now. When most of the students are ready to return to our regular schedule, we will do so.

If you need to talk to an adult, counselors are available today in the Safe Room [*identify location in building*]. You will need to take a pass and sing-in at the Safe Room when you arrive.

The school day will remain on schedule. Students are expected to stay at school and be in a room with adults present.

Source: Springfield Public Schools, Administrators Guide to Crisis Response, 1994.

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Box A: Major Steps of a Crisis Response Procedure

IF A CRISIS OCCURS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS:

Immediate Response

- Assess life and safety isues immediately.
- Provide immediate emergency care.
- Call 911 and notify police/rescue.
- Secure all areas.
- Alert school staff to the situation.
- Implement evacuation/lock down or other procedures to protect students and staff from harm.
- Avoid dismissing students to unknown care.

Within the First Hour

- Convene the crisis team to assess the situation and implement the crisis response procedures.
- Evaluate available and needed resources.
- Activate the crisis communication procedure and system of verification.
- Adjust the bell schedule to ensure safety during the crisis.
- Alert people in charge of various information systems to prevent confusion and misinformation.
- Notify parents.
- Contact appropriate community agencies and the school distict's public information office.

IF A CRISIS OCCURS AWAY FROM SCHOOL:

Immediate Response

- Receive notification and verify information (principal)
- Determine how to share the information (principal)

Within the Hour

- Contact the superintendent, school staff, and staff of other schools as needed.
- Contact the district media spokesperson as needed.

SUBSEQUENT STEPS FOR ALL CRISES:

Preparation for School Day

- Convene crisis team
- Hold emergency staff meeting
- Provide written statement

During the School Day

- Teachers notify students of event
- Set up safe rooms
- Provide substitute teachers
- Conduct after school staff meeting

Follow-up

- Develop memorial plans
- Provide counseling referrals
- Provide support group for students
- Provide grief and loss information

Source: Dwyer, K., Osher, D., and Warger, C. (1998).
Source: Springfield Public Schools, ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE TO CRISIS RESPONSE, 1994.

Box B: Suggestions for Crisis Planning Media Communication

1. USE KEY STAFF and community communications to dispel rumors.
2. CONTROL the grapevine. Check rumors at the source (what I heard, who's going to check it out, the facts, who's going to clear it).
3. MAINTAIN AN ATMOSPHERE OF OPENNESS AND TRUST. Be honest about mistakes. Provide plans for correcting weaknesses. Enlist aid. Fill requests for comments, interviews, photos, statistics. The approach of a school staff member is, "We can use all the help we can get to solve this problem – together."
4. SWIFTLY SUPPLY APPROPRIATE KNOWN INFORMATION. "Officials" are often *not* believed, which is why a method of key communicators is helpful. Reporters talk to community or staff people, the people "close" to the problem.
5. SET UP AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION before you see the need to use them. Reap benefits over the long term of having already developed a cooperative relationship with the media.
6. DISCUSS WITH STAFF their role in crisis situations. Identify a line of spokespersons – an order of who will speak when first spokesperson is not available. Outline and assign administrative duties.
7. MAKE SURE ADULT STAFF members answer phones during and immediately after a crisis.
8. DON'T SAY WHAT YOU THINK – only what you *know* to be true.
9. REIN-IN YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT and be aware of its predominance in others.
10. PROVIDE A PRESS ROOM (crisis communication center). If possible, set up a room with phones separate from office of person in charge (principal) but near the scene of the crisis. Assign a staff member to remain there who knows what is going on and is in touch with both principal and media. (Administrative assistant to the superintendent can help here.)
11. TAKE INITIATIVE with media where possible, as you're better off informing them than not.
12. BE WILLING TO SHARE INFORMATION, but don't speculate when all the facts aren't in. Emphasize what is not yet known as well as what is known (see 8 above).
13. EMPHASIZE WITH MEDIA AND STAFF YOUR UNDERSTANDING of their ability to help handle the crisis by informing them. Thank them for their cooperation and resist rapping publicly the ones who aren't helpful.
14. ANNOUNCE A SCHEDULE of times when district spokespersons will meet the media – on the hour, on the half hour – but if you get new information they're seeking, don't wait until scheduled time to provide it.
15. USE A PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM or bullhorn to address crowds if available.
16. REMEMBER ANYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE FOR THE RECORD. Phone conversations will probably be taped. It's a good idea, when possible, to also tape from your end.
17. EXPLAIN TO REPORTS WHY you can't provide certain information (e.g., privacy rights of anyone involved, hinderance to investigations, etc.)
18. IF A REPORTER BECOMES A PROBLEM, explain why you are having trouble communicating (e.g., "I can't answer that now, but if you'll let me get back to you in three minutes, I can.").
19. CONSIDER ALL CONCEIVABLE COMMUNICATION TOOLS: telephone trees, bulletins, hotline phones, paid advertising, posted notices, district-wide mailings.
20. DECISIONS NOT TO COOPERATE with the media should be made only as a last resort by the superintendent or designee. Since public education is public sector, noncooperation should be rare indeed.

Source: Springfield Public Schools, ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE TO CRISIS RESPONSE, 1994

- *The principal* holds an emergency staff meeting after school or before school the next day, (depending on timing of the notification) to update the staff on current conditions and prepare them for the upcoming school day. He or she reviews logistics as to where counseling services will be available in the building, how students can access them, and other procedures to follow during the day. The principal provides a written statement containing both the facts of the incident and directions for the day.
- *During the school day:* It is important that all teachers give consistent information when notifying students of a tragedy. A sample announcement is provided here for your review. Students who need emotional support should be dismissed to counseling centers or "safe rooms" (more detailed information on setting up safe rooms appears later). Substitute teachers are available to support the staff members. A second staff meeting is recommended after school to debrief the day. During this meeting, staff reviews the status of referred students, prioritizes needs for the next day, and begins to plan follow-up activities.
- *Follow-Up:* Within a few days to a week, the principal convenes a planning group (may be different members from the crisis team) to discuss outside counseling referrals, memorial plans, and the need for on-going support groups. The planning group provides grief and loss information as appropriate to classroom teachers. Within two weeks, the crisis team should meet to debrief the intervention.

Communications

Rapid and easy communication is important during a crisis. In a large crisis, radios and cell phones may be needed when the phone lines become overloaded. Following the shooting at Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, for example, all the school phone lines jammed, and no calls were possible either to or from the school for a period of time. Additional phone lines (staffed by live operators) should be available if there is a large demand for information. Immediately following the Thurston shooting, multiple phone lines with one central number were established and staffed twenty-four hours a day. The principal should send frequent messages to other schools in the district. School personnel should be aware that members of the media could monitor radio frequencies.

Media

The communications officer or designee should handle all media communications during a crisis. This person should update information frequently and control rumors during a crisis through scheduled press conferences held away from the site of the event, as well as present "official" information, in conjunction with law enforcement and hospital staff. The communications office announces the time of the next press conference and recognizes the importance of working with the media during a crisis, as the media can assist in relaying important information to the public. In general, it is best not to allow the media on school grounds, or if necessary, only when students are not present. Box B provides suggestions for media communication.

Dealing With Loss

THE SAFE ROOM

When an event occurs such as the death of a student or staff member, many students can be affected in such a way that functioning in normal school routines is impossible. The safe room is a location (one or more rooms) in the school where students receive counseling support. Counselors trained in the dynamics of child and adolescent grief and loss staff the room. These counselors may come from either outside the building or outside the district, as needed.

We recommend preparing a set of materials ahead of time. A box including the items listed in Box C will be helpful.

MEMORIALS, FUNERALS AND HEALING EVENTS

Memorials

School memorials or memory activities serve an important function in the grief process for students and staff. A memorial promotes the healing process by providing an opportunity for students to join together and participate in

Box C: Material for Safe Room

- Name tags for staff
- Safe room record sheet (to record who is in and out)
- Paper – lined and unlined; colored
- Pencils, pens, markers
- Suggested activities list
- Discipline referral slips
- Tissue box

ON DAY OF CRISIS EVENT, INCLUDE:

- Fact sheet (statement by principle as to what happened)
- Current schedule of classes and breaks
- Water and cups

a ritual. The memorial may take many forms, from a simple tree planting to a more traditional "service." In addition, a school memorial brings closure to a period of grieving and serves as a clear statement that it is time to move on with regular school activities. Examples include:

- Tree or flower planting.
- Dedication of a plaque or picture.
- Fund raising for a scholarship, charity, or a piece of equipment or relevant audiovisual materials or books.
- Assembly of interested students as a remembrance/service. This event may include:
  - published readings;
  - stories or poems written by students and staff;
  - reflections on the life of the deceased student;
  - music selected by students or some of the deceased's favorite music;
  - message by a clergy familiar with the deceased student;
  - collection of memorabilia that reflects the life of the student (e.g., table with photos, piece of his or her favorite sports equipment).

Planning Memorials

Memorials should be planned carefully along the following guidelines:

- Keep the memorial short (i.e., fifteen to twenty minutes for elementary students, thirty to forty minutes for secondary students).
- Involve students (particularly those close to the deceased), in the planning of the memorial.
- Include music, particularly student performances. Playing soothing music as people enter sets the mood and maintains calm (particularly important at the middle school level).
- Preview the memorial service with students beforehand. This is not a normal assembly, so prepare students for what will happen and how they should behave. (Remove anyone from the service who behaves inappropriately.)
- Include several brief speakers. If students have written poems or other tributes, students or staff can read a selection of them. Practice, practice, practice.
- Invite family members but recognize they may choose not to attend.
- Involve all students as much as possible. For example, to the extent appropriate for their age, each class can make a poster or banner to bring to the memorial to hang on the wall.
- Use symbols of life and hope. Balloons or candles can be used effectively to promote a positive, uplifting message that acknowledges the sadness yet is hopeful for the future.
- Have all students and staff attend, unless a parent has a specific objection. It is a powerfully unifying experience for a school, and it sends a message to students that each person is important in the school and deserves to be noticed and honored.
- Provide a quiet activity for students who do not attend, or dismiss them.
- Have students return to their classrooms for a short time after the service. This affords them an opportunity to talk with one another or talk with a counselor. Support rooms work well for students who are experiencing graver indications of grief.
- If the death was the result of suicide, a public memorial is not advised.
- Plan the activity to occur within a week of the death if possible.

A sample memorial service agenda is provided for you here.

Permanent Memorials

School personnel should not rush into the completion of a permanent memorial, as time and emotional distance from an incident often bring insight into the design. Students should be involved in the planning and design of a memorial and in establishing who will make final decisions. Staff should define the roles of students, staff, administrators, family, and community members in the process and carefully consider the location of a permanent memorial.

Funerals and Healing Events

To the extent possible, plans should be coordinated between the school and families regarding funerals and other healing events. In a large crisis, it is often necessary to dismiss school early to allow students and staff to attend a funeral or memorial. Community healing events such as a candle light vigil serve an important function in the healing process.

Special Situations

When the school is a crime scene; law enforcement will establish a "crime scene" under the following circumstances: (1) murder or suicide, (2) death due to suspicious circumstances, (3) if a person is the victim of a crime and may possibly die, or (4) for serious crime. Only authorized personnel will be allowed to enter the crime scene, and an officer will be in charge of serving as the liaison with the school's administration (Los Angeles Unified School Dis-

SAMPLE MEMORIAL SERVICE AGENDA

ANY MIDDLE SCHOOL — OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Celebration of Life In Remembrance of

[NAME]

date
time
location

QUITE MUSIC – as teachers enter with their classes in the main gym, a designated student should place the class project on the front of the stage. If the project is to be taped to the wall, teacher brings tape and places the piece at the front of the gym.

MUSIC – *It's So Hard to Say Good-bye,* choir

OPENING COMMENTS – Mr./Ms. [name]

STUDENT SPEAKERS – Mr./Ms. [name] will introduce student speakers in the following order:

1. [name]
2. [name]
3. [name]
4. [name]
5. [name]
6. [name]

MUSIC – *"Wind Beneath My Wings,"* special student ensemble

COMMENTS – Mr. [name]

MUSIC – *"Amazing Grace,"* choir

STAFF SPEAKERS – Mr./Ms. [name] will speak and introduce the staff who will speak.

MUSIC – *"Blowin' in the Wind,"* choir

BALLOON RELEASE – In remembrance of [name], we will have a balloon release in the field, south of C wing. Please observe the following directions [while quiet music is played]:

1. Volleyball and wrestling coaches will come to stage and get balloons.
2. Eighth grade volleyball team and wrestling team will come forward and receive a balloon and move quietly to the field.
3. After all balloon carriers are out, the students will be dismissed by classes to walk quietly to the field. Teachers form a ring around the balloon carriers and students stay with their teacher.
4. Mr./Ms. [name] will announce the balloons release when all students are assembled.
5. Students will be released to return to their last period class.

NOTE: Safe rooms will be available, and substitute teachers will assist classroom teachers if needed.

A special edition of the school newsletter should be given to students upon return to classroom. Please pickup newsletters at noon in your boxes.

Source: Springfield Public Schools, ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE TO CRISIS RESPONSE, 1994.

trict, 1998). It is imperative that all school employees and community members (students, parents) not interfere or contaminate any identified crime scene. Under these circumstances, the principal is temporarily not in charge of the school building.

The difficult task of delivering death notification is the responsibility of law enforcement personnel who have the training and resources necessary to carry out such a notification. In the event a victim's family member comes into contact with school personnel prior to law enforcement providing notification, the family should be escorted to a private, comfortable setting until law enforcement personnel arrive.

TRAUMA: CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

When a number of students/staff have witnessed a traumatic event, specially trained counselors may be needed to conduct specific debriefings, known as critical incident debriefings to aid the survivors in normalizing their feelings surrounding a trauma. Consult outside resources such as the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA), 1-800-TRY-NOVA, for these debriefings if the event has a large impact on the community.

RETURNING TO THE SCENE

It is difficult for students and staff to return to a school where a traumatic event has occurred. The Crisis Team may need to design a plan that makes it easier for victims to adjust and return to school. For example, following the Thurston tragedy, an open house on Memorial Day allowed staff, students, and their families to re-enter the campus. Over 2000 people sat or stood in the repaired cafeteria that day, though many other affected students were unable to return to this scene of terrible violence.

After a Crisis: Follow-Up Procedures

Following a crisis intervention, staff, students and team members may be exhausted and wish things could just return to "normal." The community of the school, however, is frequently permanently affected both by the loss and by the experience of witnessing the grief of students. It is critical that school personnel recognize the long-term impact of a death (or other tragedy) and provide support for both staff and students. Discipline problems often result from grief or loss issues that students do not face during follow-up. One to two weeks after a crisis, a school should consider the following:

FOR STUDENTS

Identify individual students who need follow-up counseling. Establish drop-in support groups within the school during lunch. Form a six to eight week grief support group if needed. Introduce grief and loss materials into the curriculum. Table 2 provides an illustration of behavioral, emotional, physical, and cognitive manifestations of grief (Alexander, 1999).

Recognize that follow-up work may continue for weeks or months. Help parents understand their children's reaction to the crisis. In the aftermath of a tragedy, children may experience unrealistic fears of the future, have difficulty sleeping, become physically ill, and be easily distracted, to name just a few common symptoms. Provide both short-term and long-term mental health counseling following a crisis through on-site support groups or referrals to community counseling agencies.

FOR STAFF

Help staff deal with their reactions. Debriefing and grief counseling are just as important for adults as for students. Just as students can have reactive symptoms, so can adults. The ability to teach may be affected. Convene the Crisis Response Team so the team members can discuss their reactions to the intervention. Invite all persons who participated in the intervention, including outside building counselors who assisted in the Safe Room. Someone who is trained but was not part of the intervention should lead this debriefing. Provide at least one session with the entire staff to review grief dynamics and share their feelings.

CRISIS RESPONSE EVALUATION

Within two weeks of a crisis intervention, it will be helpful for the Crisis Response Team to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the response through a staff questionnaire and/or group discussion. A facilitator who is not a member of the crisis team is a good person to direct the discussion. A sample evaluation questionnaire is provided on page 17.

CARE OF THE CAREGIVERS

Do not overlook the need to take care of those who provide immediate and long-term support services. Some suggestions follow for caregivers:

- Talk to family or friends about how you are feeling/doing.
- Write your thoughts and feelings in a journal.
- Write poetry.

Table 2: Manifestations of Grief in Youth

BEHAVIORAL/SOCIAL

- Regressive behaviors (bed wetting, thumb sucking, clinging, tantrums, immaturity)
- Aggressive behaviors (hitting, demanding)
- Rebellious or defiant behaviors
- Withdrawal or passivity
- Hyperactivity
- Increased need for reassurance (e.g., not wanting to initiate or go home, clinging)
- Hoarding (food, toys, etc.)
- Changes in eating patterns (more or less)
- Drop in grades (caused by difficulty in concentrating and attending)
- Drug use
- Sexual promiscuity
- Reckless or self-destructive behavior
- Crying
- Nonstop talking, attention getting

EMOTIONAL

- Self-blame and guilt (*"I caused it to happen, I could have prevented it."*)
- Fear (*"Who will take care of me? Will it happen to me too? Will people remember or care about me? I have to pay the price..."*)
- Numbness
- Withdrawal
- Demanding behavior
- Helplessness or hopelessness
- Despair
- Yearning and pining
- Unaccepting
- Pensive
- Anger
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Boredom
- Apathy

PHYSICAL

- Changes in appetite
- Sleep disturbances or changes
- Bowel and baldder disturbances/changes
- Temporary slowing of reactions
- Headaches
- Stomach ache
- Rashes
- Breathing disturbances
- Exaggeration of allergies
- Increased number of colds and infections

COGNITIVE

- Impaired self-esteem
- Disturbances in cognitive functioning (attention span deficit, hperactivity)
- Exaggerations in "magical thinking" (*"I made it happen."*)
- Avoidance and denial of the loss
- Idealization of the past
- Idealization of the future
- Increase in nightmares

SAMPLE CRISIS EVALUATION

Staff Crisis Evaluation Questionnaire

In order for us to improve our school crisis plan and provide feedback to the crisis response team, please take time to complete this evaluation. Thank you.

Please return to _____ by _____

In what capacity do you serve this school? _____

Scale: 1 = very helpful 2 = helpful 3 = not helpful NA = Not Applicable

Notification before school (phone tree)	1	2	3	NA
Before-school staff meeting	1	2	3	NA
Availability/function of Safe Room	1	2	3	NA
Crisis response team members present	1	2	3	NA
After-school meeting	1	2	3	NA
Presentations by crisis team during meetings	1	2	3	NA
Other: _____	1	2	3	NA

Were crisis team members approachable and supportive (group or individuals)?

What was most helpful about the response?

Suggestions for improvement of the crisis response team or of the response?

Do you know who might need follow-up?

Is there training that would help in future crisis response?

Further comments:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Write letters of regret and appreciation about anything in life.
- Draw pictures. Get into art.
- Play a game or sport. Get lots of exercise.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Listen to raucous music and dance!
- Snack on healthy foods. Take vitamins.
- Drink water.
- Enjoy a bubble bath.
- Care for your pets and house plants.
- Take a favorite stuffed animal to bed with you.
- Read a favorite story.
- Ask someone who loves you to read you a story.
- Let yourself cry.
- Ask for a hug. Ask for another hug.
- Get lots of sleep.
- Spend time in prayer or meditation.
- Collect a favor from someone who owes you one!
- Treat yourself to a massage.
- Light a candle.
- Sing loud.
- Laugh. Rent a great, hilarious video. See a fun flick.
- Ask for a hug. Ask for another hug.

Every school needs to be prepared for a variety of serious crisis events – from a student death to a bomb threat. As Marleen Wong, Director of Mental Health Services for the Los Angeles Unified School District, has said, "There are two types of schools in America today: those that have had a major crisis, and those that are about to" (Wong, Address to Springfield School District staff, September 1998). School staff should make Crisis Response an integral part of school improvement planning each year.

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Organizations, Agencies

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), FEMA Publications, PO Box 70274, Washington, DC 20027; (202) 646-3484.

Hamilton Fish National Institute on School & Community Violence, 1925 North Lynn Street, Suite 305, Rosslyn, VA 22209; (703) 527-4217; *http://www.hamfish.org.*

Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, 1265 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97401-1265; (541) 346-3592; *http://interact.uoregon.edu/ivdb/ivdb.html.*

National Crime Prevention Council, 1700 K. St. NW, Second Floor, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 393-7141.

National School Safety Center, 4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290, Westlake Village, CA 91362; (805) TRY-NOVA; *http://www/try-nova.org.*

National Association of School Psychologists/National Emergency Assistance Team, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814; (301) 657-0270; *http://www.naspweb.org.*

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 810 Seventh Street NW, Washington, DC 20531; (202) 307-5911; *http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/.*

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